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SUBJECT: CHAD REFUGEES CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE OF SUDANESE  
REBEL CLASH

¶1. (SBU) Less than 24 hours after UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative informed Charge that Sudanese refugees in camps along the northern Chad border with Sudan were in imminent danger, fighting broke out in and around the camps between Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) non-signatories aligned with the Sudanese rebel group Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and what are reported to be forces of DPA Signatory Mini Minnawi and the Government of Sudan. The fighting appears to have subsided, but about eighty Sudanese are now inside Chad either wounded or seeking refuge. The clash took place on Chadian territory and JEM appears to have instigated the conflict. Moving some 50,000 thousand refugees some 250 miles into the interior of Chad to another refugee site will be a major undertaking, but last night's fighting underscored the urgent need to relocate the camps for the well-being of the refugees and in order to maintain their civilian and humanitarian nature. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On Saturday, October 7, UNHCR representative Serge Male informed Charge that the refugees in Oure Cassoni and Am Nabak camps would need to be relocated to a new site further in the interior as soon as possible. Both of these camps are located quite close to the Sudanese border (Oure Cassoni is only seven kilometers from the border.) Male's visit to the region a few days earlier had persuaded him that the civilian and humanitarian nature of the camps was seriously compromised and that the safety of the refugees could no longer be guaranteed.

¶3. (SBU) Male noted that Sudanese government forces and DPA signatories had moved into position just two kilometers across the border from Oure Cassoni camp. On the Chadian side, near Lake Cariari, were JEM and Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA) non-signatories. Male explained that the camps themselves were recruiting grounds for Sudanese rebel groups, and the fact that camp leaders consistently reported that there were "no security problems" was good evidence that the camp leadership was itself SLA. Another issue of concern was protection of the 5,000 - 6,000 pro Mini Minnawi Sudanese in Zone A of Oure Cassoni who find themselves vastly outnumbered in the pro-JEM camp.

¶4. (SBU) In addition to the intra-Sudanese rebel conflicts, some thirty kilometers away from Oure Cassoni camp, a group of Chadian Gorans who have been denied refugee status have been harassing camp officials and humanitarian workers, including throwing stones at workers and attacking vehicles. These are also suspected to be working with the JEM members camped by Lake Cariari. Male stated that local capacity to control the expected Sudanese rebel clash or to protect humanitarian workers from the disgruntled Gorans was

"minimal." Male is urgently seeking to place the 15 additional gendarmes which the Government of Chad had promised to the UN for refugee protection in Bahai, recognizing that this will only be a palliative measure. However, the government is dragging its feet on implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding, and no gendarmes have been provided.

15. (SBU) Male explained that the UN has known for some time that the camps close to the border were highly problematic. They have been seeking GOC cooperation to relocate the camps westward. After local authorities nixed various alternative sites, a site has now been found west of the town of Biltine (some 250 kilometers away from the current site). Local authorities have approved the site for refugee use, but a water survey must still be performed to determine how much water is available. Male acknowledged that the refugees would resist relocation. He has been in communication with GOC authorities to let them know that the camps must be relocated. He has stressed that this must be presented to the camps as a GOC decision (which will be accomplished with UNHCR assistance). Male has not yet informed NGO partners about the move, although High Commissioner Guterres is aware of the situation and would issue a statement expressing concern about the need to maintain the humanitarian and civilian nature of the camps.

16. (SBU) The next day Male informed Charge that fighting had indeed broken out between what JEM and non- DPA signatory SLA members and the SLA DPA-signatories and Government of Sudan forces. The confrontation took place on Chadian territory slightly north of Bahai in Cariari (which straddles the border). The UN reported some 77 Sudanese soldiers wounded who are now in Bahai. Chadian government sources confirmed that a confrontation had taken place on Chadian territory,

NDJAMENA 00001215 002 OF 002

with the JEM described as the attacker. According to those sources, some 81 Sudanese fled into Chad of which 21 were wounded. GOC sources also reported that a Sudanese aircraft was shot during the fighting and the fighting had also spilled into the refugee camps.

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